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HANGARTALK

The story behind the story

"It's an airplane," Editor in Chief **Tom Haines** reminded himself whenever he flew the Meridian, which he borrowed from Piper Aircraft for a few weeks this fall ("Turbine Pilot: Time Machine," page 58). "To those of us with thousands of hours flying piston airplanes, moving up to a turbine can be intimidating, but at the end of the day, it's still an airplane and, from a flight characteristics standpoint, it flies like most every other airplane you've flown." The challenge is managing more sophisticated systems and that's where good training comes in. As Haines reports in "Training for the Task" (page 62), initial training from a manufacturer-approved company goes a long way toward satisfying the insurance company and helping a transitioning pilot feel confident in his skills.



"The ease of opening *AOPA Pilot* and reading about an airplane often belies the difficulty it takes to research that article," says contributor **Barry Schiff**. "That's especially true when trying to finagle training from the military in one of its most controversial aircraft, the Bell Boeing V-22 Osprey. After months of effort, the Marine Corps finally turned me down because it was too busy training MV-22 pilots for deployment to Afghanistan. I then focused my tenacity on the U.S. Air Force, which eventually invited me to visit its 71st Special Operations Squadron." The result is "Flying Schizophrenic" on page 66. Schiff says that officers at Kirtland AFB were willing to tell him how the Osprey will be used by Special Ops—but then he would not be allowed to leave.

Thinking she needed some excitement in her life, North Carolina pilot and journalist **MayCay Beeler** confesses she had asked the universe to throw her a bone—something to lift her spirits and propel her on a fresh new adventure. Well, you know what they say—"Be careful what you wish for." Beeler joined pilots from all over the world on the great Cross-Canada International Air Rally ("Crazy for Canada," page 74). This was a journey she never dreamed she'd fly "in a million years," she says, remembering her early flight training. As a co-host for the syndicated TV show *PM Magazine*, Beeler learned to fly in the 1980s for an assignment that would change her life. Her first solo aired on TV in an effort to encourage viewers to follow in her footsteps and learn to fly. She went on to fly with Gen. Chuck Yeager, the *Voyager* crew, and compete in the transcontinental Air Race Classic, as well as set world aviation records—all documented in numerous television features highlighting her passion for flight. Today, she is a flight instructor in Greensboro, North Carolina.



"You remember reading about how examiners are required to test your ability to handle distractions in the cockpit? The reason, I've learned, is because of flying with family," says Associate Editor **Ian J. Twombly**. "Using the airplane as a tool to load up your family and go somewhere via GA is an intensely satisfying experience, but it's not without its challenges. To arrive safely, you'll need to prepare yourself and your family." Twombly, a commercially rated pilot and CFII, and a first-time dad of now-two-year-old Charlie, takes many trips with his wife and young son, and has learned there's more to flying than just aviating, navigating, and communicating ("Let's All Go," page 83).



Crazy for Canada

Flying the Governor General's
Cup International Air Rally

BY MAYCAY BEELER

"This is not a tour, it's a rally!" declares Aviation Connection's International Air Rally President Catherine Tobenas in a sharp French accent. "Not a holiday, but a challenge, for true fliers!" The petite Canadian is addressing a group of weary yet exhilarated participants who have formed a close-knit family since coming together from all over the world to fly the great Cross-Canada Air Rally. Through every province and every territory the rally is ambitious and demanding, covering more than 6,000 nm in 16 days. Only a special anniversary could justify a commemoration such as this air rally on steroids. "It's Canada's Centennial of Flight," Tobenas explains. "And there's no better way to honor this historic celebration than with the first ever flight of this kind."

You may think you'd need a Learjet to cover so much territory—and one was indeed in the rally—but the rest of the airplanes included Cessna 172s, a Piper Arrow, a Mooney, a Cirrus SR20, a Beech Musketeer, a sprinkling of Cherokee Sixes, a Diamond DA40, a Lake Amphibian, and more. Thirty airplanes started out on the rally, with 12 making it to the end. Mechanical problems, weather woes, personal issues, and personality conflicts sent many participants and their airplanes home early.

I left home, rally bound, in a Liberty XL2. With full authority digital engine control (FADEC) running the show, this state-of-the-art, low-carbon-footprint machine is touted as the world's most advanced two-seat piston aircraft. Having instructed countless hours in one, I can tell you that its stick, push rods, and sexy sports-car appeal make it a joy to fly. My son agrees. So, with an invitation to join me on the rally—an event open to anyone—my 18-year-old private pilot son, RJ, aimed the airplane northwest from Greensboro, North Carolina. We headed for Winnipeg, the rally starting point, with enough navigation charts to crush a moose. Canada, here we come!

With high hopes but multiple weather fronts as constant companions, a planned two-day journey stretched into a four-day affair, with thunderstorms grounding us along the way—eventually delaying us so much we could not catch the rally's start in Winnipeg; it was headed for the Yukon. Most other pilots had flown commercially into Winnipeg to rent airplanes and started the 6,000-nm rally fresh from there. My plan to travel 1,100 miles to the starting point in a 110-knot airplane

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK HELSETH



Scenes from the air rally—a Cessna 170 on the ground at Caniapiscau, Quebec (top left); rally participants preparing caribou meat (bottom left); a sunrise ceremony (center); planning the route (center left); the author (second from left, above) and her crew Chris Gallant (left), Martin Elder and Debbie Hines; the conga line as the rally proceeds (left).

In thunderstorm-loving July was not the best idea. What was I thinking? Supermom I am not. We went home.

Tobenias decided I should fly the airlines to meet the rally in Montreal for part two. (Part one had covered western and central Canada July 30 through August 8. Part two crossed eastern Canada and the Maritimes August 9 through 15.) With the Liberty and my son at home (R) had to start back to school, I was assigned to ride as a volunteer CFI with 700-hour VFR pilot Martin Elder from Ottawa in his seasoned, faded, endearing Cherokee Six. "He's a good pilot, but needs a bit of confidence building with an instrument instructor," Tobenias told me.

Elder welcomed me warmly, gently mentioning that he'd never flown with a female flight instructor before. In the back of the airplane sat his love, Debbie Hines, and a traveling Englishman, Chris Gallant, a free spirit roaming the world sampling new adventures. Yes, the rally also was open to passengers who wanted to see the countryside.

I soon discovered fellow rally participants who came from places such as Australia, Switzerland, and France. A few were from the United States. Most were French Canadians like Elder. The participants brought with them a wide range of experience from first-time, student, and low-time VFR fliers, to world-record-breaking pilots with umpteen hours. A few volunteer CFIs came along to help some participants hone their skills while working on new ratings.

Each day presented a flight to a new destination. Most legs ran in the 300-nm range with a faster scout airplane flying

ahead to check out weather conditions and relaying them back to the pack. After a briefing from the rally's designated air boss, pilots filed their own VFR flight plans, then took off spread out in a very loose formation, as a group sharing position reports on a discrete frequency. "Group flying gives pilots the opportunity to fly places they'd never dream of going on their own," Tobenias explains. "It instills confidence, a sense of adventure."

As the organizer, along with husband Camil Dumont, of the nonprofit Aviation Connection—which connects pilots and raises funds for a pilot mentor program that matches volunteer flight instructors with students, enabling youth to live a unique flying adventure free of charge—Tobenias says her greatest satisfaction is seeing the rally participants happy. "I love hearing comment like, 'Thank you for making my dream a reality.'" This is Tobenias' ninth rally. It's a family affair. Both of her teenage children fly, as does Dumont.

The rally had its share of challenges. On part one

poor weather and smoke from forest fires in British Columbia ambushed the tight schedule, forcing the group to fly double time to make up for lost time, covering more than 800 nm in a single day. That's a lot of flying for a 172! On the Eastern Canada crossing, as Elder and I were making our approach (this is a VFR rally) into picture-perfect blue sky Havre St. Pierre, Quebec, a lone renegade patch of thick fog suddenly rolled in off the water and made a beeline for the runway. Elder expertly ducked the Cherokee Six under the ever-lowering cloud deck to make a safe landing at the last minute (I was positioned for the go-around). We went IMC on the rollout. A while later, after attempting several approaches, a brave rally Aussie Cessna 172 pilot finally managed a landing after the fog moved a hair. A harrowing experience to hear, yet not see, was the airplane barely above the runway in the fog. Prayers were whispered. Later the ceiling dropped to zero. The last of the rally pilots to make their approach immediately diverted to another airport at Sept-les.

The locals along our trek welcomed us to their hometowns. In Digby, Nova Scotia, they spoiled us with sautéed scallops at the airport. Lavish accommodations and an impressive reception awaited us at the Digby Pines Resort. In

Mont-Jolie, hundreds of locals showed up at their seaside airport to admire our airplanes and thank us for dropping in. In Churchill, Manitoba, polar bear sightings were common, and whales made appearances on the Eastern crossing. In Montreal, Bombardier treated us to a stellar tour of its factory, showing off the world's brightest new regional jets.

Valerie de Kalbernalten brought her 18- and 21-year-old sons to the rally from Switzerland for 16 days of immersion in learning to fly, their first time ever in a small airplane, with volunteer CFI Paul Kelly from Minnesota. "I wanted to give my boys a gift that would enable them to see the Earth from a different perspective. Being above it, they can be detached from all the problems and trappings of the planet, and know they can be free," de Kalbernalten explains. Another inspiring rally team featured middle-aged, 2,000-hour Mooney pilot Don Berliner of New Jersey and his passenger, Dory Dickson. Dickson's ancestors are the Piccards of balloon-record fame. She endured the arduous rally in spite of an accident that has left her with physical challenges that would keep most people grounded at home.

Other interesting fliers included a colorful Australian who flies rallies worldwide. "I'm addicted to flying,"



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confesses Mike Watson, a 5,600-hour CFI who brought his wife and 71-year-old mother-in-law along for the ride.

My rally family consisted of Elder, Hines, and Gallant. Hines offered great support, rubbing Elder's shoulders from her back seat and feeding us snacks to keep us going. Gallant looked for traffic and helped decipher the Canadian nav charts. I kept Elder on his altitude while he steered *Sueety*, his pet name for the 43-year-old Piper, around Canada. Elder is easygoing, happy-go-lucky, and never in a rush. As an instructor, I respect this, knowing that rushing can make pilots forget things that lead to mishaps. Elder took his time. He took so much time, in fact, that I urged him to push his weary Cherokee Six to fly faster by throttling up a bit on our long journey. But he preferred to pamper the engine with conservative power settings. I soon adapted to his pace.

The surprising and very nice thing about the rally is that although the schedule was tight and hectic, the experience did not have to be, and it was not for us. We took our time. The rally is not a race. If you chose to, you could compete for the chance to win the 2009 International Air Rally's trophy, the prestigious Governor General's Cup, by answering questions, correctly estimating ETAs, and undergoing evaluation on air and ground skills. Having flown in a miserably cutthroat air race years ago, I had a negative taste in my mouth for any type of competitive flying. However, Elder cured me of that. He approached the competition on his own terms, making it a pleasure to share the cockpit with him. In fact, as a totally unexpected delight, we won the competition, the whole shebang, and were awarded the Governor General's Cup. How neat is that?

Next year, the International Air Rally heads to Japan. "New York to Tokyo! An incredible adventure! Not a tour, but a rally, a challenge for *true* flyers," Tobenas reminds us. Will Elder take his Cherokee Six? "I think I'll quit while I'm ahead," he says.

Want to fly the rally to Tokyo? Visit the Web site (www.airrally.com).

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MayGay Beeler, AOPA 849322, is an Aviation Connection Mentor; Aviation Connection is the official trustee of the Governor General's Cup. Beeler is a journalist, CFI, ATR, FAAS Team representative, and AOPA Airport Support Network volunteer in Greensboro, North Carolina.